

No BULL ... I'm Hurt

By 2Lt Diana Black, Vandenberg AFB, Calif.

Each of us needs to focus our attention on extreme sports safety to ensure our personnel are educated and trained before they engage in this type of high-risk activity. This is an entire team effort, required not just from commanders, but from all personnel to protect ourselves, our fellow airmen, and our families.

While attending the Aerospace Basic Course (ABC) in Alabama, I became aware of a gap in the safety program: the hazards of riding a mechanical bull.

One of my classmates who was addicted to line dancing but didn't have a car asked me to take her some place where she could get a

chanical bull in the corner, I said, "I bet some of the guys would bring you here this weekend if you tell them there's a mechanical bull." She agreed this was a good plan, and we returned to base shortly thereafter.

In case you don't know, Air Force training bases require temporary-duty students who engage in high-risk activities to undergo a briefing. There is a list of specific high-risk activities, such as skydiving, downhill skiing, and motorcross racing, and anything not on the list, by default, isn't considered high risk. Riding mechanical bulls wasn't on that list when we attended ABC, which seems surprising.

The Monday morning after our trip to the bar, I was greeted with the question, "Did you hear about James?" This 32-year-old, prior-ser-

went up and right, and James, being skilled, counterbalanced by throwing his weight up and left. Unfortunately, his right foot became trapped momentarily between the bull and its pedestal. He heard two distinct snaps and realized these weren't good sounds. After uttering a choice word or two, he released the rope and slithered as gently as possible to the padded floor.

James said he didn't immediately feel anything, but he knew something wasn't right. Meanwhile, the gang rushed over laughing; they assumed the bull had just bucked him off until he said, "I think I hurt my foot."

One of the students said, "Oh, you just twisted your ankle." He immediately grabbed James' shoelace and started tightening it to prevent swelling.

James quickly stopped him. He saw something jutting out oddly on the inside of his leg and calmly said, "I think I need to go to the emergency room."

The students picked James up, put him in a car, and

drove him (moaning) to the nearest hospital, where a nurse showed him an X-ray of his leg. She explained the tibia wasn't supposed to be sticking out against his skin like a tent. She also said the fibula wasn't supposed to be lined up with the butt-end of the tibia like it was, nor was part of his heel supposed to be free-floating.

This information, coupled with the fact the shock was wearing off, nauseated James, so the nurse gave him a continuous morphine drip, and he was very "happy" — when he was conscious.

James underwent emergency-reconstructive surgery about 0700 Sunday morning and emerged with a 6-inch metal plate and seven screws in his ankle. Extra bags of morphine kept him in a pain-killer stupor for 5 days, and he missed the final week of class. He also spent several weeks on convalescent leave.

What could have been done to prevent this mishap, other than not getting on that bull in the first place? More appropriate clothing — boots, in-



Photo by SSgt Derrick C. Goode

stead of the tennis shoes he was wearing — may have helped, but no one knows for sure. He also could have remembered and had more respect for his advancing years and physical condition. There are many things you can't do that you did 10 years ago.

Some might wonder if alcohol was involved, since this incident happened in a bar. James, however, was drinking responsibly. He had consumed only one-and-a-half beers on a full stomach. It's important for all of us to remember that mechanical bulls may look harmless, but, as James learned, they're a rough way to have fun. ▶

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After being trampled by the bull he was attempting to ride, a service member is carried off by emergency personnel at the Professional Armed Forces Rodeo Association's World Finals. Extreme Sports require extra attention to safety. A moment's fun can lead to living with an injury for a lifetime.

Extreme sports like scuba diving, extreme skiing, snow boarding, bungee jumping, and bull riding are now all part of ACC members' off-duty recreation, and all have significant inherent risks.

"fix." We found a nice bar off base — called True Country, or something similarly unoriginal — one Wednesday night.

I knew the night would be short because I usually prefer sleeping to dancing and drinking. Noticing an inactive me-

vice butterbar had ridden the mechanical bull.

Everyone else had been thrown off. James was doing well, though, and, as he got better, the operator turned up the skill level — just to make sure James didn't get bored or fall asleep. At one point, the bull